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# Moments in History

Commemorating Women's Role in Canadian History



Ontario  
Women's  
Directorate

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## Agnes Macphail: Canada's First Woman MP and Ontario's First Woman MPP

**A**gnes Campbell Macphail learned of her 1921 election victory in the lamp-lit kitchen of her farm home, surrounded by an enthusiastic gathering of friends and well-wishers.

The former schoolteacher had become Canada's first woman Member of Parliament (MP), and would be the first Canadian woman to enter the males-only preserve of the federal legislature!

But although Macphail's election made history, it didn't even make the front page of the Toronto Globe newspaper. Few of the country's daily newspapers bothered to interview Macphail.

Despite this initial indifference, and the hostility she later faced from some of her male colleagues, Agnes Macphail enjoyed a long and distinguished

political career. She fought for policies that helped advance rights for women, pensions for seniors, workers' rights and prison reform. She founded the Elizabeth Fry Society and travelled to Geneva as a delegate to the League of Nations, where she was an active member of the World Disarmament Committee.

In 1943, after serving for 19 years as a federal MP, Agnes Macphail repeated in Ontario what she had done federally. Macphail won a seat,

representing the riding of East York, and became the first woman Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP).

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***During Women's  
History Month  
1993, we  
celebrate the 50th  
anniversary of the  
election of Agnes  
Macphail,  
Ontario's first  
woman MPP.***

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**1943** Agnes Macphail becomes Ontario's first woman Member of Provincial Parliament.

**1973** Ontario Status of Women Council founded. First Council included two men, and no women of colour, no women with disabilities, and no Aboriginal women. Provincial regions were not adequately represented.

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# Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues

The late 1960s and early 1970s was a time of great social change on this continent. The women's movement was gaining momentum and the call for changes to government social policies was louder than ever before.

In 1973, in response to public demand, the Government of Ontario established the Ontario Status of Women Council (now called the Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues). The council was set up as an independent, arms-length organization which would comment on the government's direction and policies related to women.

The Advisory Council has pushed the government forward on such issues as family law reform (particularly with respect to property), gender bias in school textbooks, pay equity,

and affordable child-care.

One of the advisory council's great successes was in lobbying for a government agency dedicated to women's issues and women's equality, with a minister to oversee it. The government founded the Ontario Women's Directorate in 1983, and appointed the first Minister Responsible for Women's Issues.

The first, 15-member, Status of Women Council included two men, no women of colour, no women with disabilities, and no Aboriginal women. Several regions of the province were not represented. Over the years, the Advisory Council faced growing criticism that it did not represent the broader community.

So, in 1991, the government held a series of consultations asking women across the province how

to improve communication between themselves and the provincial government. Out of those consultations emerged a new mandate for the council.

The current council is the first to have been selected through nominations by the public. The membership now reflects Ontario's diverse population and the interests of its regions. Individual members represent the municipalities of: Windsor, Sioux Lookout, Ottawa, Grafton, North Bay, Atikokan, Toronto, London, Thunder Bay, Kapuskasing, and Kingston.

OACWI has its first francophone president, and she oversees a council whose membership represents Aboriginal women, women of colour, women with disabilities, francophone women, and white women.

The continuing evolution of the council reflects its continuing effort to serve, as effectively as possible, as the "voice" of Ontario's women.

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**1990** Zanana Akande becomes the first Black woman and the first woman of colour elected to the Provincial Parliament, and the first appointed to Cabinet.

**1993** First Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues selected by a public nomination process. Jacqueline Pelletier becomes first francophone president. Council representative of the following communities: Aboriginal women; women of colour; women with disabilities; white women.

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***This year we  
celebrate the 20th  
anniversary of the  
Ontario Advisory  
Council on Women's  
Issues and the 10th  
anniversary of the  
Ontario Women's  
Directorate.***

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